

Message Text

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S E C R E T ATHENS 6867

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GR

SUBJECT: GREEK POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: KARAMANLIS

1. IT WILL SOON BE TWO MONTHS SINCE KONSTANTINE KARAMANLIS RETURNED TO GREECE AND HIS TWO SENIOR COLLABORATORS, GEORGE MAVORS AND EVANGHELOS AVEROFF-TOSSITZA WERE SWORN INTO OFFICE AS FOREIGN MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE IN THE COALITION CABINET FORMED BY KARAMANLIS TO RESTORE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT TO GREECE. THE REEMERGENCE OF THESE THREE MEN--ALL OF THEM PROMINENT IN GREEK POLITICS FOR A QUARTER OF A CENTURY OR MORE--ILLUSTRATES A CARDINAL RULE OF GREEK POLITICAL LIFE: GREEK POLITICS IS A THEATER OF PERSONALITIES AND THE FRAGILITY OF ITS STRUCTURE IS BOTH CAUSED AND COUNTERBALANCED BY THE DURABILITY OF GREEK POLITICIANS. THE SYSTEM CAN NEITHER SURVIVE NOR PREDECEASE THEM BECAUSE THE POLITICIANS ARE THE SYSTEM. ON APPRAISING THE PERFORMANCES OF KARAMANLIS,

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MAVOR AND AVEROFF, THEREFORE, WE ARE ALSO JUDGING THE

POLITICAL CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY PERFORM. THE PRESENT TELEGRAM DISCUSSES KARAMANLIS AND SUBSEQUENT MESSAGES WILL TREAT MAVORS AND AVEROFF.

2. KARAMANLIS. SINCE HIS RETURN FROM ELEVEN YEARS OF EXILE IN FRANCE, AND PARTICULARLY SINCE HIS ANNOUNCEMENT THAT GREECE WOULD WITHDRAW FROM NATO, IT HAS BECOME FASHIONABLE TO SAY THAT KARAMANLIS SEES HIMSELF AS A GREEK DE GAULLE. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN KARAMANLIS AND DE GAULLE HOWEVER ARE AS STRIKING AS THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GREECE AND FRANCE. IT WOULD BE MORE ACCURATE TO SAY THAT KARAMANLIS SEES HIMSELF AS THE STRONG NATIONAL LEADER OF A COUNTRY WHICH RESISTS STRONG NATIONAL LEADERSHIP AS STUBBORNLY AS FRANCE. THE COMPARISON BREAKS DOWN BEYOND THAT POINT BECAUSE KARAMANLIS IS AS GREEK AS DE GAULLE WAS FRENCH AND, PROPHETIC MANNERISMS ASIDE, HE IS A PRAGMATIC MAN WHOSE AMBITION IS TO TRANSFORM GREEK SOCIETY NOT GREECE'S PLACE IN THE WIDER WORLD.

3. DESPITE HIS YEARS ABROAD KARAMANLIS IS NOT A POLYGLOT INTERNATIONALIST LIKE THE ELDER VENEZELOS AND OTHER GREEK STATESMEN BEFORE AND AFTER HIM WHO CUT A MORE CONVINCING FIGURE IN GENEVA OR PARIS THAN IN ATHENS. KARAMANLIS IS PALPABLY THE PRODUCT OF HIS RURAL MACEDONIAN ORIGINS. HE IS GENERALLY UNCOMFORTABLE WITH NON-GREEKS, AVOIDS THEIR COMPANY AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, AND IN HIS EARLIER YEARS AS PRIME MINISTER WAS DELIGHTED TO LEAVE THE CARE AND FEEDING OF FOREIGN DIGNITARIES TO AVEROFF WHO IS AUTHORITATIVE IN ALMOST ANY LANGUAGE EXCEPT GREEK.

4. THE TERSENESS OF KARAMANLIS AND HIS DIRECTNESS ARE MACEDONIAN CHARACTERISTICS. THAT TO MANY FOREIGN OBSERVERS HIS PERSONALITY SEEMS "UNGREEK" IS SIMPLY AN INDICATION THAT KARAMANLIS IS NOT THE KIND OF GREEK MOST FOREIGNERS MEET. TO SOME EXTENT KARAMANLIS IS AN OUTSIDER EVEN IN ATHENS. HE HAS NEVER BEEN PART OF THE GREEK POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT, THE SO-CALLED "KOLONAKI CROWD" FROM WHOSE RESIDENCES IN A FASHIONABLE PART OF DOWNTOWN ATHENS RADIATED THE VALUES AND UNWRITTEN BY-LAWS THAT REGULATED GREEK PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY BEFORE 1967. EVEN THOSE

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LIKE HELEN VLACHOU, THE INFLUENTIAL AND CONSERVATIVE PUBLISHER OF KATHIMERINI, WHO SUPPORTED KARAMANLIS POLITICALLY WHEN HE FIRST BECAME PRIME MINISTER, HAD TROUBLE ESTABLISHING PERSONAL RAPPORT WITH HIM. BY THE SAME TOKEN KARAMANLIS' RELATIONS WITH THE ROYAL FAMILY WERE NEVER CLOSE, ALTHOUGH IT WAS KING PAUL, ON AMERICAN ADVICE, WHO IN 1955 ELEVATED HIM TO THE PREMIERSHIP OVER THE HEADS OF SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE PAPAGOS GOVERNMENT.

5. IT IS THIS QUALITY OF BEING SOMEONE APART THAT DISTINGUISHES KARAMANLIS FROM ALMOST ALL OF THE GREEK POLITICIANS OF HIS GENERATION. IT HAS BEEN A SOURCE OF WEAKNESS IN PARLIAMENT AND IN PARTY POLITICS AND A SOURCE OF STRENGTH IN ELECTIONS AND IN THE COUNTRY AT LARGE. HE HAS BEEN A CONSISTENTLY SUCCESSFUL VOTE GETTER OVER THE YEARS BUT HAS ALWAYS HAD DIFFICULTY IN HOLDING HIS CABINET TOGETHER. PUT ANOTHER WAY, HE HAS ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION RECEIVED A POPULAR MANDATE TO FORM THE KIND OF STRONG GOVERNMENT HE FAVORS, BUT THE GOVERNMENTS HE FORMED HAVE BEEN WEAKENED BY THEIR LACK OF POLITICAL COHESION.

6. THE MACEDONIAN ORIGINS OF KARAMANLIS ALSO EXPLAIN SOMETHING ABOUT HIS APPROACH TO FOREIGN POLICY. HE WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THAT PART OF GREECE WHICH HAS BEEN MOST DIRECTLY EXPOSED TO SLAV PRESSURES FROM THE NORTH-BULGARIAN AND YUGOSLAV IRREDENTISM--HISTORICALLY MILITARY AND MORE RECENTLY CULTURAL--ARE A MENACING PART OF THE FOLKLORE OF NORTHERN GREECE. THE GREEK CIVIL WAR, KNOWN TO CONSERVATIVE GREEKS AS THE BANDIT WAR, WAS INTIMATELY LINKED WITH TRADITIONAL SLAV PRESSURES ON GREECE AND FOR ANYONE OF KARAMANLIS' GENERATION THE MEMORY IS ALIVE.

7. THIS DIMENSION OF HIS EXPERIENCE, COUPLED WITH A MACEDONIAN LACK OF DEVIOUSNESS IN HIS CHARACTER, LIMITS THE AMOUNT OF MANEUVERING KARAMANLIS IS LIKELY TO UNDERTAKE IN THE DIRECTION OF NON-ALIGNMENT. HE HAS BEEN CONSISTENTLY SUSPICIOUS OF GREECE'S COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS AND IT WOULD BE HARD TO SAY WHETHER HIS ANTIPATHY IS MOTIVATED MORE BY POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS OR BY THE PAN-SLAV CONNOTATIONS THAT COMMUNISM CARRIES IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE. HIS PERFORMANCE ON THIS POINT HAS
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BEEN CONSISTENT, AT LEAST UP UNTIL THE NATO WITHDRAWAL, AND THIS MAY EXPLAIN WHY HE REACTS WITH SUCH IRRITATION TO ANYTHING HE INTERPRETS TO BE A LECTURE ON THE DANGERS OF COMMUNISM.

8. THE KARAMALIS WHO RETURNED TO GREECE IN JULY OF THIS YEAR IS STILL RECOGNIZABLY THE KARAMANLIS WHO LEFT IN A HUFF IN 1963. THE DIFFERENCES SEEM MORE OF FORM THAN SUBSTANCE. SOME GREEKS SAY HE HAS MELLOWED, WHICH MAY BE A WAY OF SAYING HE HAS GAINED PERSPECTIVE. CERTAINLY HE SEEMS TO HAVE USED HIS ABSENCE WELL AND TO HAVE GROWN IN EXILE. HE IS EASIER TO TALK TO AND HAS DEVELOPED A SENSE OF HUMOR. HIS ENGLISH AND FRENCH HAVE IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY THOUGH NOT HIS HEARING. HE SEEMS MORE CONTROLLED THAN HE USED TO BE. HIS

TEMPER IS COOLER AND THE ROUGH HANDLING OF HIS COLLEAGUES WHICH DROVE RALLIS AND PAPALIGOURAS OUT OF HIS GOVERNMENT AND BROUGHT IT DOWN IN 1958, IS LESS EVIDENT. ACCORDING TO ONE MINISTER IN THE PRESENT CABINET WHO SEES KARAMANLIS DAILY, HE HAS LOST HIS TEMPER ONLY TWICE SINCE RETURNING, ONCE WHEN AN ECONOMIC MINISTER WAS UNPREPARED IN A CABINET BRIEFING, THE SECOND TIME WHEN GEORGE MAVROS IMPLIED TO TIME MAGAZINE THAT THE U.S. HAD CONSPIRED WITH THE COLONELS TO OVERTHROW MAKARIOS. ACCORDING TO THE SAME SOURCE, IT WAS KARAMANLIS WHO FORCED MAVROS TO MAKE HIS RATHER UNCONVINCING DENIAL ON THE LATTER OCCASION.

9. MORE IMPORTANT THAN THESE CHANGES HOWEVER IS ANOTHER THAT IS LESS TANGIBLE. KARAMANLIS TODAY SPEAKS WITH GREATER AUTHORITY AS A NATIONAL LEADER THAN EVER BEFORE. WHATEVER HE GAINED IN EXILE CANNOT BE MORE VALUABLE THAN THE CONFIDENCE HE GAINED WHEN HE RETURNED. IF AS SEEMS INCREASINGLY LIKELY, HE ASPIRES TO BECOME PRESIDENT OF A NEW GREEK REPUBLIC, THE POPULAR FOUNDATION HAS BEEN LAID. IN A COUNTRY LIKE GREECE THIS IS A CONSIDERABLE BUT BY NO MEANS IMPERISHABLE ADVANTAGE. BY CAPITALIZING ON IT KARAMANLIS MAY WELL BECOME THE STRONG NATIONAL LEADER THAT GREECE NEEDS, BUT HE WILL HAVE TO CREATE THEREAFTER A POLITICAL STRUCTURE THAT CAN SURVIVE HIMSELF.

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